

# Rebalance to the Pacific: A Case for Greater Amphibious Capabilities in the US Army

A Monograph

by

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## **Abstract**

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The United States is in the midst of rebalancing towards the Asia-Pacific region. This shift in national focus and strategy requires a careful examination of current US military concepts and capabilities to protect US interests and ensure regional stability. However, the security environment in the Pacific is not as benign as some studies might suggest. Separated from most of the world by two oceans, force projection is an enduring concern for the US military. This combination of the geography and emergence of Anti-access / Area Denial capabilities places additional emphasis on preparing for the initial stages of any conflict within this expansive theater where arriving forces may not have sufficient combat power or adequate freedom of maneuver to achieve the initial operational or overall strategic objectives. The purpose of this study is to examine why the US Army should develop greater amphibious capabilities. Focusing on how the conditions that require amphibious capability emerge, this study compares the events that lead to Operation Chromite with the current setting in the Asia-Pacific, particularly with the rise of China, to identify continuities that will help generalize future conditions where the US Army would again rely on significant amphibious capabilities. The study concludes that the current geopolitical and military environment within the context of China's geopolitical tensions and military modernization requires greater amphibious capabilities within the US Army. As part of the US Joint Force, greater amphibious capabilities provide the necessary means to establish and maintain maneuver within the Pacific, which serves to deter and defend against potential Chinese aggression.

## Contents

Acronyms .....	v
Figures .....	vi
Introduction .....	1
Section I: Operation Chromite Case Study .....	8
Ends: Reunification with South Korea .....	9
Means: Transforming the Korean People's Army with Speed and Maneuver .....	12
Ways: A Land-based Strategy .....	16
Section II: China Today .....	24
Ends: Consolidating Peripheral Territories and Reunification with Taiwan .....	25
Means: Modernizing the People's Liberation Army with A2/AD Capabilities .....	29
Ways: Strategic Defense in Depth Across the Western Pacific.....	35
Conclusion.....	40
Bibliography .....	44

## Acronyms

A2/AD	Anti-access/Area Denial
ADIZ	Air Defense Identification Zone
AF	Amphibious Force
ASBM	Anti-Ship Ballistic Missile
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
C2	Command and Control
DOTMLPF	Doctrine, Organization, Training, Material, Leadership & Education, Personnel, and Facilities
DPRK	Democratic Republic of Korea
FEAF	Far East Air Force
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ISR	Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance
JCEO	Joint Concept for Entry Operations
JLOTS	Join Logistics Over-the-Shore
JOAC	Joint Operational Access Concept
KPA	Korean People's Army
LACM	Land-Attack Cruise Missile
LF	Landing Force
LOC	Lines of Communication
ONI	Office of Naval Intelligence
PACOM	Pacific Command
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRC	People's Republic of China
ROK	Republic of Korea
SAM	Surface-to-Air-Missile
SLOC	Sea Lines of Communication
TF	Task Force
UN	United Nations
UNC	United Nations Command
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of Sea
USC	United States Code

## Figures

1	The Korean Peninsula .....	15
2	China's First and Second Island Chains.....	37

## Introduction

Indeed, as we end today's wars, we will focus on a broader range of challenges and opportunities, including the security and prosperity of the Asia Pacific...Going forward, we will also remember the lessons of history and avoid repeating the mistakes of the past when our military was left ill-prepared for the future. As we end today's wars and reshape our Armed Forces, we will ensure that our military is agile, flexible, and ready for the full range of contingencies.

-President Barack Obama, *Sustaining Global Leadership: Priorities for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

The United States is in the midst of rebalancing towards the Asia-Pacific region. This shift in national focus and strategy requires a careful examination of current US military concepts and capabilities to protect US interests and ensure regional stability. The security environment in the Pacific is not as benign as some studies might suggest.<sup>1</sup> Rather, it remains uncertain as evidenced by the spread of violent extremism in countries such as India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines. Additionally, North Korea remains highly unpredictable and continues to be a threat to destabilize the East Asian region.<sup>2</sup> Of greater concern is the rise of China, who not only seeks to secure territory around their periphery within the South and East China Seas and eventually reunify with Taiwan, but their recent economic success and military modernization may, if not already, provide them the means to challenge US interests and forcibly achieve their ambitions. Thus, as indicated by President Obama's quote above, while the rebalance continues, the US military must prepare to meet the 'full range of contingencies' within

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Chalk, *The U.S. Army in Southeast Asia: Near-Term and Long-Term Roles* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2013), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel J. Locklear, speaking for US Pacific Command, on March 25, 2014, to US Senate Armed Services Committee, "PACOM Senate Armed Services Committee Posture Statement", accessed October 14, 2014, <http://www.pacom.mil/Media/SpeechesTestimony/tabid/6706/Article/8597/pacom-house-armed-services-committee-posture-statement.aspx>.



this vast and dynamic region; this includes a large-scale conflict against a potential adversary such as China.<sup>3</sup>

Separated from most of the world by two oceans, force projection is an enduring concern for the US military. Within the Pacific theater, the geography alone presents significant logistical challenges as eighty-three percent of the region is water and the distance from the western shores of the United States to major developed areas in Asia can easily range over 5,000 miles. Additionally, recent trends indicating the proliferation of anti-access / area denial (A2/AD) capabilities worldwide adds to the existing problems by potentially creating conditions that further delays or outright denies the arrival of US forces.<sup>4</sup> This combination of the geography and emergence of A2/AD capabilities places additional emphasis on preparing for the initial stages of any conflict within this expansive theater where arriving forces may not have sufficient combat power or adequate freedom of maneuver to achieve the initial operational or overall strategic objectives.<sup>5</sup> Fundamentally, if the US military lacks the ability to effectively project combat power into this region, this not only reduces the United States' ability to defeat aggression, but also diminishes the overall chance of deterring future conflict as well.

The purpose of this study is to examine why the US Army should develop greater amphibious capabilities. Stated simply, this capability enables military forces to “use maneuver

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<sup>3</sup> For purposes of this monograph, the Asia-Pacific region aligns with US Pacific Command's Area of Responsibility, which extends from the Indian subcontinent to the western shores of the Americas. It includes the eastern portions of the Indian Ocean, the Pacific Ocean, East Asia, and Southeast Asia. US Pacific Command, “US PACOM Area of Responsibility,” accessed January 24, 2015, <http://www.pacom.mil/AboutUSPACOM/USPACOMAreaofResponsibility.aspx>.

<sup>4</sup> Anti-access are those actions and capabilities, usually long-range, designed to prevent an opposing force from entering an operational area. Area-denial are those actions and capabilities, usually of shorter range, designed not to keep an opposing force out, but to limit its freedom of action within the operational area. Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), *Joint Operational Access Concept (JOAC)* (Washington, DC: US Department of Defense, January 17, 2012), 6.

<sup>5</sup> Doctrinally, this stage is termed ‘Seize the Initiative’ where the immediate objective is to gain access to theater infrastructure and expand friendly freedom of action. Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2011), V-8.

principles to transition ready-to-fight combat forces from the sea to the shore in order to achieve a position of advantage over the enemy.”<sup>6</sup> Operationally, amphibious capabilities are the means necessary to conduct forcible entry operations over the littorals, otherwise known as amphibious operations, to seize and hold lodgments against armed opposition and enable the continuous landing of troops and materiel for subsequent operations.<sup>7</sup> Today, the Army’s overall ability to conduct amphibious operations has significantly atrophied over the past sixty years where it once conducted regular amphibious training, institutionally established an amphibious command, and maintained the requisite doctrine to conduct amphibious operations under hostile conditions.<sup>8</sup> Given the change in US strategy and focus towards the Pacific, it is prudent to relook the possibility of rehabilitating these capabilities that proved vital in past conflicts such as World War II and the Korean War.

Before moving on, the term “amphibious capabilities” and how this study relates this term with the US Army requires clarification. First, the term “amphibious capabilities” in this study is much broader than simply material equipment such as amphibious ships. Instead, this term encompasses the doctrine, organization, training, material, leadership & education, personnel, and facilities (DOTMLPF) necessary to conduct amphibious operations. This comprehensive approach is necessary to provide relevant, efficient, and sustainable solutions for the Army. Moreover, this term references the ability to support operational maneuver under hostile conditions. With the emergence of A2/AD capabilities, effective capability development

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<sup>6</sup> Joint Publication 3-02, *Amphibious Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014), I-2.

<sup>7</sup> Forcible entry operations seize and hold lodgments against armed opposition. A lodgment is a designated area in a hostile or potentially hostile operational area that, when seized and held, makes the continuous landing of troops and materiel possible and provides maneuver space for subsequent operations. Joint Publication (JP) 3-18, *Joint Forcible Entry Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), I-1.

<sup>8</sup> Donald W. Boose Jr., *Over the Beach: US Army Amphibious Operations in the Korean War* (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2008), 24-8, 35-9.

must consider operations under a non-benign environment. Given the limited scope of this study, this monograph will not explicitly discuss how, across the DOTMPLF, the Army should develop amphibious capabilities. Instead, this study will focus on *why* the Army should consider expanding this capability.

Next, Joint Publication (JP) 3-02, *Amphibious Operations*, defines amphibious operations as “a military operation launched from the sea by an amphibious force (AF) to conduct landing force (LF) operations within the littorals.”<sup>9</sup> The LF is the ground combat unit and its associated support units that will conduct tactical operations once ashore. According to JP 3-02, the LF may consist of combinations of US Marine Corps and Army units.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the doctrinal framework to increase amphibious capabilities within the Army already exists. However, a key distinction to note is depending on the purpose of the amphibious operation and type of environment, whether permissive, uncertain, or hostile, the LF may arrive ashore in multiple echelons. In uncertain or hostile conditions, the first echelon will likely seize key terrain or neutralize the immediate threat before the next echelon of the LF arrives. These actions constitute an amphibious assault.<sup>11</sup> The proceeding echelons, which are still part of the LF for the overall amphibious operation, would transit ready-to-fight forces ashore to support the first-echelon or assume another mission. As the US Marine Corps is already well versed and equipped as the US military’s principle amphibious assault force, in this study, references to amphibious capabilities and the US Army is not directed towards becoming an amphibious assault force. Rather, it pertains to other activities required by the LF such as rapidly transiting personnel, vehicles, and cargo ashore immediately after the initial amphibious assault force secures their initial objectives.

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<sup>9</sup> Joint Publication 3-02, *Amphibious Operations*, I-1.

<sup>10</sup> As part of the landing force, Army forces may provide intra-theater ship-to-shore transport to include landing craft, cargo handling, logistics, traffic control and engineering capabilities. Ibid., II-8.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., I-3.

To effectively answer the research question, this study will turn to the last large-scale operation that required amphibious capabilities and involved the US Army to determine if similar circumstances could exist again in the near future. During the Korean War, the US Army's X Corps as the LF, along with the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division as the amphibious assault force, and the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division as the second echelon LF, conducted an amphibious operation, known as Operation Chromite. This operation required 103 various types of amphibious ships and landing craft to transport more than 53,000 soldiers and marines, 6,629 vehicles, and 25,000 tons of supplies ashore.<sup>12</sup> As a result of the successful landing in Inchon, this enabled General Douglas MacArthur, the commander of US and Republic of Korea (ROK) forces, to envelop the North Koreans, recapture Seoul, permit the break out from the 'Pusan Perimeter,' and arguably turned the tide of the war.

However, rather than looking at the detailed operational and tactical aspects of Operation Chromite itself, this study focuses on how the conditions that required this operation emerged. By comparing the events that lead to Operation Chromite with the current setting in the Asia-Pacific, particularly with the rise of China, the aim is to identify continuities that will help generalize future conditions where the US Army would again rely on significant amphibious capabilities. Granted, numerous independent variables ultimately affect the relationships within and between events, and acknowledging this complexity, the intent is not to claim with absolute certainty that future events will unfold in the same manner as the past. Short of accurately predicting future contingencies, this monograph asserts the best alternative is to plan based off known continuities.

The events that led to Operation Chromite demonstrate timeless principles for US forces engaged in a large-scale conflict in the Pacific. The ability to gain access *to* the area of operations and the ability to maintain freedom of maneuver *within* the area of operations is central to any successful campaign or operation on land. The recently released *Joint Operational Access Concept* echoes these

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<sup>12</sup> Allan R. Millet, *The War for Korea, 1950-1951 They Came From the North* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 242-4.

principles by stressing the “ability to project military force into an operational area with sufficient freedom of action to accomplish the mission.”<sup>13</sup> Gaining access fundamentally requires isolation of the battlefield in sufficient time and space to enable combat power to arrive in sufficient strength, while maintaining freedom of maneuver, a more nebulous idea, fundamentally requires relative advantages in capabilities over an opponent. Complicating these matters in the vast maritime feature of Pacific theater are the inherent time and distance disadvantages where against a capable adversary, US forces are likely to arrive amidst hostile conditions, thus increasing the difficulties projecting power and establishing sufficient maneuver space to effectively transition to decisive offensive operations. The initial stage of the Korean War accurately depicts these conditions as General MacArthur continuously fought to maintain isolation of, and maneuver within, the battlefield to generate sufficient combat power and transition to offensive operations. Thus, as the Army clarifies how to operate effectively within the Pacific, studying Operation Chromite provides a useful model to discern what type of capabilities are necessary to succeed if faced with another large-scale conflict in the Pacific.

In terms of methodology, this study compares and contrasts the ends, ways, and means of a past adversary, North Korea, with a potential adversary, China, to analyze what were, and could be, future impacts on our ability to isolate and maneuver. In doing so, this allows the study to illustrate the utility of amphibious capabilities for the Army through historical analysis, and then determine if it might become relevant again for the future given the current context of the rebalance, emerging threats, and constant geography of the Pacific.

Doctrinally, ends refer to the objectives and desired state, ways refer to the sequence of actions most likely to achieve the ends, and means refer to the resources required to achieve the ways.<sup>14</sup> Using this framework, in this study, ends refer to the political aims, ways refer to the operational methods to

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<sup>13</sup> JCS, *Joint Operational Access Concept*, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Joint Publication 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2011), II-4.

achieve the political aims, and means refer to the tactical capabilities required to enable the operational methods.

The first section provides a case study that examines the ends, ways, and means employed by North Korea during the initial stages of the Korean War while comparing the same factors in terms of the US response. Analyzing the geostrategic context from 1947 to 1950 in East Asia illustrates how North Korea's leader, Kim Il-sung, adopted political aims that ultimately lead the North Korean People's Army (KPA) to suddenly attack South Korea. Next, within the same period, investigating the military environment seeks to identify how North Korea generated the means to achieve their political aims. Finally, a closer look from the onset of hostilities to the start of Operation Chromite reveals the North Korean ways. Given the ends, means, and ways available to North Korea, the study seeks to reveal what type of capabilities, or relative advantages in means, enabled ways for the US forces to overcome the operational challenges posed by North Korea and achieve the (initial) US ends. Evidence will reveal the significance of amphibious capabilities for the Army, as it provided additional ways to maneuver within the theater of operations and effectively transition to offensive operations.

The second section utilizes the same framework of ends, means, and ways to examine the current context of the Asia-Pacific with a focus on China. Examination of the geostrategic context in East and Southeast Asia in relation to China seeks to illustrate similarities between North Korea's political aims that ultimately led to conflict. This depicts the possibility for conflict, thus establishing the relevance for the Army in preparing for a possible conflict against China. Next, an examination of the military environment with a focus on China's People's Liberation Army's (PLA) recent military modernization and available strategies will illuminate stark differences in terms of available means and ways to that of North Korea. Evidence will show that the PLA's investment in A2/AD capabilities affords them the operational methods to not only disrupt US power projection, but also deny the US forces' critical ability to isolate and maneuver within the theater of operations. The intent is not to merely demonstrate how China's capabilities are greater than North Korea's capabilities in the past. Rather, the relational difference between current US means and those available to China clearly depicts

the obstacles to the fundamental principles of gaining access and maintaining freedom of maneuver during large-scale conflicts in the Pacific.

The final section completes an analysis that compares how the US military countered the North Korean strategy during the Korean War, and how they might counter the PLA in the future. The study concludes by summarizing the relevance of the historical example and the current geopolitical and military context, which together clearly answers the research question of why the Army should develop greater amphibious capabilities.

### **Section I: Operation Chromite Case Study**

The geopolitical tensions that emerged between the United States and Soviet Union in East Asia after World War II placed the divided Korean state squarely in between the two powers. Weary of becoming engaged in another conflict, each of the powers attempted to preserve their respective influence in East Asia by establishing a buffer state. However, it was the deliberate actions and decisions of North Korea, specifically its communist leader, Kim Il-sung, who identified his own ends, acquired the means, and developed the ways, which led to the Korean War. Resultantly, this caused the United States enter another war in the Pacific less than five years after the conclusion of World War II.

Two months into the conflict, the US forces were unable to halt the North Korean advance and clung to an ever-tightening perimeter on the southeastern tip of South Korea by September 1950. However, with relative advantages in available means, specifically air, naval, and amphibious capabilities, this enabled operational ways of continuously isolating and maintaining freedom of maneuver within the Korean peninsula. Without these capabilities and the enabling effects, Operation Chromite, which “reversed the tide of the war completely,” would not have been successful.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> US Army X Corps, “Headquarters X Corps War Diary Summary for Operation Chromite: 15 August to 30 September 1950,” 1, accessed December 22, 2014, <http://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p4013coll11/id/831>

### Ends: Reunification with South Korea

From the time Kim ascended as North Korea's leader, his ends were to create a "great socialist state" by reunifying the two Koreas.<sup>16</sup> In 1947, with the United States and Soviet Union unable to agree on how to unify the two Koreas following their occupation after World War II, the United States turned to the United Nations (UN) for assistance. In response, the UN passed a resolution calling for national elections without interference from outside nations to create a Korean government.<sup>17</sup> The UN established a temporary commission to oversee the elections, however, the Soviet Union refused to grant the commission access to the north claiming the United States violated previously established arrangements to work bilaterally. Nevertheless, elections took place only in the south and in August 1948, Syngman Rhee became the first democratically elected president and soon thereafter, formed the Republic of Korea (ROK). In September, the Soviet Union responded by unilaterally establishing the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) with Kim Il-sung as the appointed leader who claimed "jurisdiction over the entire country."<sup>18</sup>

With North and South Korea formally divided, the leaders of the new regimes adopted a policy that would essentially result in a zero sum game for the opposing government. Historian William Steuck described Korea's new leaders as "fiercely nationalistic and determined to reunite their country under their own rule."<sup>19</sup> For Rhee, he believed an invasion by the north was an imminent threat, therefore it was prudent to attack first. Further, since the UN recognized the ROK as the only legitimate

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<sup>16</sup> Millet, *The War for Korea: 1950-1951 They Came From the North*, 45.

<sup>17</sup> Allan R. Millet, *The War for Korea: 1945-1950 A House Burning* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 126.

<sup>18</sup> Wainstock, *Truman, MacArthur, and the Korean War*, 6.

<sup>19</sup> Stueck, *Rethinking the Korean War*, 69.



government in all of Korea, Rhee believed the UN authorized him to form an army capable of invading North Korea and reunifying the two states.<sup>20</sup> The problem for Rhee was the lack of means to pursue his ends, thus he looked to the United States for military assistance to transform his constabulary army. Recognizing the danger of Rhee's intentions, the US Defense Department and later the State Department, intentionally withheld providing any offensive military equipment that would enable a preemptive attack.

Like Rhee, Kim believed invading his southern neighbor was necessary to reunify the two Koreas. According to Soviet records, and rightfully so, Kim believed Rhee's government would never accept a "peaceful unification" and that the South would simply wait "until they feel themselves strong enough to attack the North."<sup>21</sup> Therefore, he immediately began to make plans to overthrow Rhee's "puppet" government and rid the peninsula from American neo-imperialism.<sup>22</sup> However, unlike Rhee, Kim faced fewer constraints from his protectorate to achieve his ends. With Stalin seeking to create a buffer communist state on the Asian Mainland, he identified Korea to be within the Soviet's sphere of influence and therefore agreed to arm the KPA as the Soviet forces withdrew in December 1948. Two months later, the first shipment of Soviet arms began to arrive in North Korea.<sup>23</sup>

In contrast to North Korea's ends that ultimately sought conflict, the United States undertook a limited approach to deter conflict and counter the spread of communism in East Asia. Moreover, the political ends for the United States with respect to Korea remained largely interconnected to the larger geopolitical context in East Asia. The fall of the Japanese Empire after World War II created a power vacuum in East Asia, and the United States and the Soviet Union emerged as competing powers. Originally, President Franklin D. Roosevelt had little interest in becoming a power on the Asian

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<sup>20</sup> Millet, *The War for Korea: 1945-1950 A House Burning*, 190.

<sup>21</sup> Stueck, *Rethinking the Korean War*, 70.

<sup>22</sup> Millet, *The War for Korea: 1950-1951 They Came From the North*, 45.

<sup>23</sup> Millet, *The War for Korea: 1945-1950 A House Burning*, 195.

mainland. He hoped China would emerge after the war as a counterweight to Soviet influence.<sup>24</sup>

However, with China split between the Nationalists and the Communists in 1945, leaving them weak and divided, the United States, alone, attempted to contain communism on the Asian mainland. With the abrupt occupation of Korea after World War II that left the United States and Soviet Union staring at each other along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, President Harry Truman identified American ends in Korea as establishing a communist-free state as the means to maintain security in the Pacific.<sup>25</sup>

In April 1948, President Truman approved NSC-8, titled, “The Position of the United States with Respect to Korea,” as official US policy towards Korea, which diminished the strategic importance of the peninsula and marked the beginning of US troop withdrawals.<sup>26</sup> This new policy would later influence the means and ways in which North Korea prepared for the Korean War. The review acknowledged that, “The extension of Soviet control over all of Korea would enhance the political and strategic position of the Soviet Union with respect to both China and Japan, and adversely affect the position of the US in those areas and throughout the Far East.”<sup>27</sup> However, to “reduce the drain on US resources,” and prevent situations where the US would “become so irrevocably involved in the Korean situation,” the NSC recommended withdrawing military troops from Korea as soon as possible because “the US has little strategic interest in maintaining its present troops and bases in Korea.”<sup>28</sup> At this time, most of the attention from Washington focused on a Europe-first strategy to contain communism under the Truman Doctrine and reconstruct the war-torn continent under the

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<sup>24</sup> William Stueck, *Rethinking the Korean War* (Princeton: University Press, 2002), 17.

<sup>25</sup> Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, 136.

<sup>26</sup> US National Security Council, NSC-8 “The Position of the United States with Respect to Korea,” April 2, 1948, accessed January 12, 2015, [http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study\\_collections/korea/large/documents/pdfs/kr-7-1.pdf#zoom=100](http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/korea/large/documents/pdfs/kr-7-1.pdf#zoom=100).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

Marshall Plan. Although there were general concerns within senior US officials over communism spreading within Asia, with the potential fall of Nationalist Chinese forces and the ongoing reconstruction efforts in Japan, Korea became an afterthought.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, in lieu of maintaining the military presence in Korea, which was costly given the diminished defense budget and military liability it posed, the new policy focused on a limited approach. The new emphasis was to build sufficient indigenous military strength to defend against aggression, provide economic aid to South Korea, and leverage the United Nations to establish a legitimate government authority in Korea.

#### Means: Transforming the Korean People's Army with Speed and Maneuver

With Soviet troops withdrawn by December 1948 and as the American presence also began to diminish in early 1949, this created a security vacuum between the two Koreas that led to hundreds of border clashes between 1948 and 1950.<sup>30</sup> As a result, Soviet Ambassador to North Korea, Terentii Shtykov, began sending alarmist telegrams to Moscow claiming South Korea was preparing for an invasion.<sup>31</sup> In March 1949, Kim approached Stalin in Moscow to plead for increased military assistance so he could invade South Korea. Stalin demurred citing the KPA was too weak and the political conditions were not right; Stalin did not want to become engaged in a conflict with US forces still in South Korea. However, given the security vacuum along the borders, Stalin did agree to provide additional military aid for defensive purposes only.<sup>32</sup> In May 1949, Kim received sixty-four T-34 tanks, and between October-December 1949, the Soviets sent seventy-seven more tanks and eighty-six

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<sup>29</sup> George Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: US Foreign Relations since 1776* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 637.

<sup>30</sup> Allan R. Millet, *The War for Korea: 1950-1951 They Came From the North*, 29.

<sup>31</sup> Allan R. Millet, *The War for Korea: 1945-1950 A House Burning*, 193.

<sup>32</sup> Allan R. Millet, *The War for Korea: 1950-1951 They Came From the North*, 46.

combat aircraft.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, with Soviet assistance, the North Koreans were able to convince Mao to transfer two ethnic Korean divisions from the People's Liberation Army back to North Korea.

Between late 1949 and early 1950, a series of events seemingly changed Stalin's perception to believe that the political environment in East Asia favored the Communists. This convinced him to finally approve Kim's request to invade South Korea and resulted in an upswing of Soviet military assistance to North Korea. First, in August 1949, the Soviet Union successfully conducted its first atomic test. Up until this point, the United States possessed a nuclear monopoly. With a nuclear-armed Soviet Union, Stalin now possessed capabilities that could match or dissuade the US from a nuclear war, or war altogether. Second, in October 1949, Mao Zedong's Communist forces defeated Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist forces and removed them from the Chinese mainland. With Mao's victory in China, this convinced Stalin that the balance of power in East Asia shifted towards the Communists and now Mao could commit his "attention and energy to the assistance of Korea."<sup>34</sup> Finally, in January 1950, US Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, gave a speech regarding the US' defensive perimeter in the Far East and clearly omitted territories on mainland Asia, including South Korea. This led Stalin to conclude that, "According to the information coming from the United States, the prevailing mood is not to interfere" in Korea.<sup>35</sup> Because of these events, Stalin, previously concerned over American forces returning to the peninsula, now believed the chance for successful US intervention was low and that Kim could actually prevail in his quest to reunify the two Koreas.

In January 1950, Stalin sent a message to Kim stating he was ready to help him. However, before approving an attack, the KPA required more preparations. Still somewhat concerned over eventual US intervention, Stalin emphasized the need for a rapid decision.<sup>36</sup> The Soviet Union would

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Stueck, *Rethinking the Korean War*, 73.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Millet, *The War for Korea: 1950-1951 They Came From the North*, 48.

only provide military assistance; Soviet soldiers would not participate in the war. Between February and March 1950, Stalin sent approximately one thousand military advisors from the Red Army to assist the KPA in planning. Additionally, he agreed to surge enough military equipment and supplies to bolster the KPA's offensive capabilities. By June 1950, on the eve of the North Korean invasion, the KPA had transformed from a constabulary force to a modern army comprised of tanks, mobile heavy artillery and mortars, and special operations forces. They possessed upwards of 135,000 troops with ten assault infantry divisions, a tank brigade, an independent infantry regiment, and five border constabulary brigades.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, approximately one-third of the KPA troops were experienced combat veterans who served with the Chinese Communists or the Soviet armies during World War II. In essence, North Korea's acquired means from the Soviet Union transformed the KPA to a force that was highly mobile and capable of rapidly seizing territories across land.

In contrast to the improvements made within the KPA, the US military experienced drastic reductions in troop strength and military readiness from 1945 to 1950. With World War II over, Congress began to cut military funds to a minimum to place greater emphasis on rebuilding the American economy. As a result, demobilization shrank the once massive 12-million man service to 1.4 million.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, given the strategic importance placed on rebuilding Japan and countering potential Soviet offensives, the US defense policy continued to resource General Douglas MacArthur's Far East Command with the limited means that were available.

Although undermanned and underequipped, Far East Command possessed the full complements of army, air force, and naval forces on the eve of the Korean War that provided relative advantages in means over the KPA. Eighth Army resided in Japan with four divisions. Additionally, the Far East Air Force (FAEF) included three numbered air forces based out of Japan, Okinawa, and the

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<sup>37</sup> Roy E. Appleman, *South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1992), 10-1.

<sup>38</sup> Center of Military History (CMH) Publication 30-22, *American Military History: The United States Army in a Global Era 1917-2008* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2010), 226.

Philippines respectively. FAEF controlled 1,172 aircraft, of which 350 were combat-ready planes capable of conducting air interdiction, close air support, transport, or reconnaissance missions.<sup>39</sup> The Naval Forces, Far East (NAVFE) consisted of three small task forces in the Philippines, the Marianas, and Japan that possessed cruisers, destroyers, submarines, and minesweepers. Additionally, NAVFE possessed a four-ship amphibious group and maintained operational control over twelve ex-US Navy freighters and thirty-nine LSTs “as an amphibious capability in the event of an emergency.”<sup>40</sup> In short, although the KPA significantly improved their ground war fighting capabilities, the US military, albeit suffering from reductions in troop strength and readiness, possessed combined arms and joint war fighting capabilities that provided qualitative advantages over the KPA. These relative advantages in means would later translate to operational ways that enabled US forces to overcome the inherent geographic disadvantages and the operational and tactical threats posed by the KPA.

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<sup>39</sup> Appleman, *South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu*, 50.

<sup>40</sup> Boose, *Over the Beach: US Army Amphibious Operations in the Korean War*, 80.

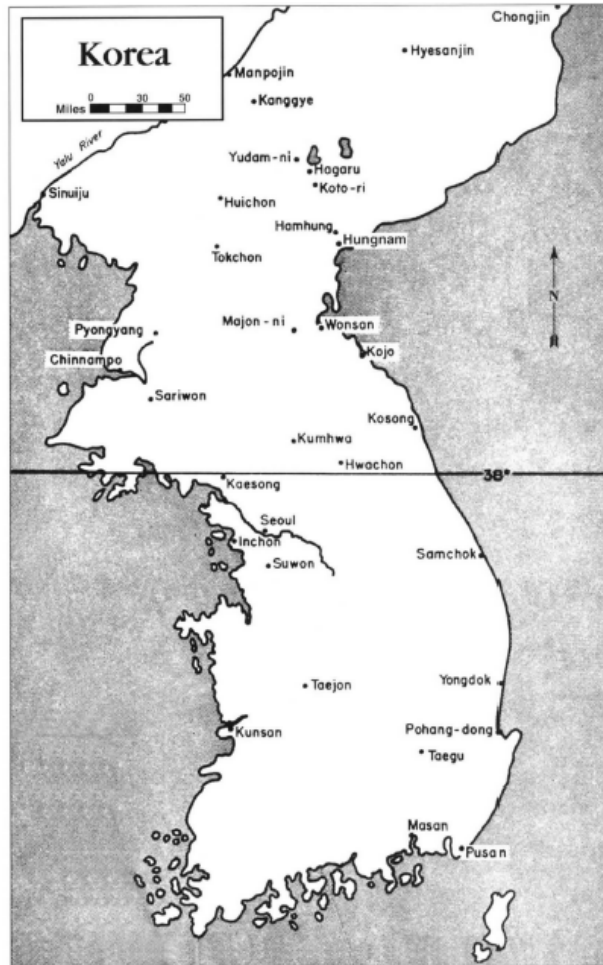


Figure 1: The Korean Peninsula

*Source: US Marine Corps Historical Center*

Ways: A Land-based Strategy

With the KPA's modernization ongoing, Kim began devising his ways to overthrow the South Korean government. In conjunction with Soviet advisors, Kim developed a plan, code named Operation Preemptive Strike, which called for a slow build-up of forces along the border while North Korean operatives deceptively engaged with the South Korean government on a "peace mission."<sup>41</sup> On order, seven assault divisions supported by the North Korean air force of about 200 aircraft and a three-regiment tank brigade (with approximately 150 T-34 tanks) would suddenly attack to open three

<sup>41</sup> Allan R. Millet, *The War for Korea: 1950-1951 They Came From the North*, 49.

corridors into South Korea and seize the capital city of Seoul (see figure 1). Behind the assault divisions were three more KPA divisions (with an additional eighty T-34 tanks) to reinforce the initial assault divisions. The KPA assumed seizing Seoul would cause the South Korean government and army to collapse, and the war would be decided, if not over, within a week or less.<sup>42</sup> If the South Koreans failed to surrender, the KPA planned to rapidly advance simultaneously southward along four corridors to destroy the remaining ROK Army and the main ports in Pusan to deny US intervention. In essence, Kim's operational ways sought to utilize speed and maneuver to engage in a land-based conflict that was restricted to the Korean peninsula. Kim believed this would rapidly disorganize the South Koreans and lead towards a quick political decision. If this failed, he would continue to leverage the same operational ways against the United States to bloody the war until it reached a favorable outcome.

In March 1950, Kim met with Stalin to discuss his plan for invading South Korea. Stalin stressed the importance of operational surprise, maneuver speed, and rear-area operations.<sup>43</sup> Kim believed he amassed sufficient means and the ways outlined in Operation Preemptive Strike aligned with the Stalin's desire for a short war. Kim promised Stalin a weeklong campaign at worst – the war would be over before the Americans would arrive.<sup>44</sup> In a telegram on May 29, Stalin finally agreed to Kim's proposal for a June invasion date. Kim would finally have the chance to pursue his ends.

The Korean War began on the morning of June 25, 1950 with KPA artillery and mortar barrages concentrating on ROK Army positions along the border. Shortly after, an invasion force of seven assault divisions containing 90,000 troops and 150 T-34 tanks launched five simultaneous attacks across the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, which caught the South Koreans completely off guard.<sup>45</sup> With the main thrust

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Wainstock, *Truman, MacArthur, and the Korean War*, 15.



heading towards the South Korea's capital city of Seoul, the ROK Army was incapable of slowing the KPA advance.

On June 26, President Truman authorized air and naval action to support South Korea south of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. Immediately, US Navy and Air Force planes cleared the KPA Air Force, consisting of about 100 planes, from the sky and began interdiction strikes along KPA targets of opportunity. Additionally, the Far Eastern naval forces began patrolling along the eastern and western waters of South Korea (and Formosa to prevent Communist Chinese forces from attacking the US-backed Nationalist Chinese forces), which effectively isolated the peninsula from potential Soviet or Communist Chinese intervention.<sup>46</sup> However, with the KPA reaching Seoul on June 28 and no political decision in sight, the KPA began preparing to continue their attack southward as planned. The next immediate objectives were to secure key airfields and ports to deny effective US entry into the war.

On July 1, President Truman fully committed the United States to the defense of South Korea by approving MacArthur's request to use all available forces "at his discretion."<sup>47</sup> Ground forces immediately available to MacArthur in Japan were the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division and the 7<sup>th</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup>, and 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions. Given the fact these divisions were undermanned, underequipped, and relatively inexperienced for the combat role they would have to assume in Korea, MacArthur did not have the luxury of waiting for fully manned divisions before committing them to Korea. The North Korean advance was already at Seoul and threatening to outpace the US' ability to deploy American units from Japan. In short, MacArthur determined he would have to commit his units in piecemeal fashion and trade space for time. In essence, the operational way for MacArthur was to preserve access to the battlefield, which would allow enough forces to arrive before transitioning to offensive operations.

MacArthur launched Task Force (TF) Smith, a 540-man advanced force from the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division on July 2, and in the following days, the remainder of the division arrived in South Korea.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 22-3; Millet, *The War for Korea: 1950-1951 They Came From the North*, 129-30.

<sup>47</sup> Wainstock, *Truman, MacArthur, and the Korean War*, 29.

However, the KPA committed nine divisions numbering approximately 80,000 men and upwards of 150 tanks advanced towards the newly arrived division.<sup>48</sup> By the middle of July, the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was unable to repel the attack and eventually withdrew almost 100 miles while losing more than 2,400 soldiers.<sup>49</sup>

Meanwhile, by early July, MacArthur's Far East Air Force (FEAF) and Naval Force continued to maintain air and naval superiority. With the KPA air forces grounded, over the ensuing months, FEAF Bomber Command launched 4,000 sorties and dropped 30,000 tons of bombs mainly against industrial targets in North Korea.<sup>50</sup> Likewise, with the KPA naval forces ineffective, the Far East Naval Forces continued to secure the western and eastern coastal waters to deter Chinese and Soviet intervention, prevented the KPA from resupplying their forces over the sea, and protected the shipping lanes for US ships arriving into South Korean ports.<sup>51</sup> Thus, the Korean peninsula remained isolated and US forces continued to trickle in through the southern ports in Pusan.

After the ROK and US forces experienced a series of defeats in early July, MacArthur realized the potential of the KPA. He eventually doubled his estimate of the ground forces needed in Korea. On July 9, MacArthur told the Joint Chiefs of Staff, "It is now apparent that we are confronted in Korea with an aggressive and well-trained professional army equipped with tanks and perhaps other ground material quite equal to, and in some categories, superior to that available here."<sup>52</sup> In addition to the four divisions already committed, he requested an additional four divisions to "be dispatched to this area without delay, and by every means of transportation available."<sup>53</sup> Moreover, adequate basing out of

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<sup>48</sup> James F. Schnabel, *Policy and Direction: The First Year* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1992), 105.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 112-3.

<sup>50</sup> Millet, *The War for Korea: 1950-1951 They Came From the North*, 170.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 171, 189.

<sup>52</sup> Schnabel, *Policy and Direction: The First Year*, 83.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 84.

Japan was insufficient to halt the KPA advance. Although movement from Japan to South Korea was only a six-hour trip by sea and one-hour trip by air, the momentum of the KPA attack proved too great for the US forces entering the theater to withhold. Thus, MacArthur requested the troops and supplies from the United States make the 5,000-mile journey directly into the Korean peninsula through the ports at Pusan to sustain sufficient combat power against the KPA.

To control US, ROK, and United Nations Command (UNC) ground forces in Korea, MacArthur established the Eighth Army in Korea on July 12. Over the next six days, the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division arrived in Korea and immediately entered the fray to delay the North Korean advance. For the remainder of July, the three US divisions, of which one, the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, was essentially combat ineffective, and five reorganized ROK divisions continued the pattern of trading space for time. After a series of defeats against the KPA, General Walton Walker, commander of Eighth Army, decided to hold firm along a 140-mile arc around Pusan, which later became famously known as the “Pusan Perimeter.”<sup>54</sup> There was no more space to yield unless he withdrew from the peninsula all together. Moreover, maintaining control over the ports in Pusan was vital to facilitate the arrival of additional US and UNC forces.

By the end of July, American casualties passed 6,000 and ROK Army losses reached 70,000.<sup>55</sup> However, later that month, replacements from the United States began to arrive and helped fill the thinned ranks within the depleted US divisions in Korea. As the units began to gain more troops, the force ratios against the KPA began to even out and the US and ROK forces were now better prepared to defend against the KPA attacks. Additionally, lead elements from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division began to arrive in Korea from the United States. By middle of August the remainder to 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>55</sup> Center of Military History (CMH) Publication 30-22, *American Military History: The United States Army in a Global Era 1917-2008*, 229.

along with the 5<sup>th</sup> Regimental Combat Team and the 1<sup>st</sup> Provisional US Marine Brigade, totaling 30,000 troops, landed in Korea to help bolster the defensive perimeter around Pusan.<sup>56</sup>

During the first two weeks of August, the KPA launched four major attacks and Eighth Army attempted a counterattack to break out of the perimeter. However, neither side was able to make any significant gains. In early September, attempting to collapse the perimeter, the North Koreans committed thirteen infantry divisions and two armored divisions totaling nearly 98,000 soldiers against the 180,000 US, ROK and UNC forces.<sup>57</sup> After two weeks of heavy fighting, the situation again settled in a stalemate with no significant gains to either side. As the KPA began preparations for another offensive, it became increasingly clear that Eighth Army's perimeter could soon collapse if more supplies and reinforcements reached the KPA. In short, after two and a half months of withdrawing, US forces lacked the maneuver space on land to effectively transition to offensive operations. However, MacArthur possessed additional means that would provide alternative ways to maneuver within the battlefield – amphibious capabilities.

From the time MacArthur initially assessed the situation in South Korea within days of the war, inclinations of an amphibious operation already began to emerge. Expressing his observations four days into the conflict, MacArthur stated in his memoirs, “The defensive potential of South Korea had already been exhausted,” and therefore, “I would rely upon strategic maneuver to overcome the great odds against me. It would be desperate, but it was my only chance.”<sup>58</sup> In September 1950, the opportune moment for this strategic maneuver finally arrived. The Korean peninsula remained isolated, and while operational maneuver over land was deadlocked, he possessed amphibious capabilities that would allow him to maneuver via the sea and envelop the KPA. The KPA advance of over 150 miles during the past three months extended their lines of communications (LOC), thus making their rear

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<sup>56</sup> Millet, *The War for Korea: 1950-1951 They Came From the North*, 215.

<sup>57</sup> Appleman, *South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu*, 394-5.

<sup>58</sup> Douglas MacArthur, *Reminiscences* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964), 333.

areas vulnerable. MacArthur believed, “The envelopment from the north will instantly relive the pressure on the south perimeter and, indeed, [an amphibious landing] is the only way that this can be accomplished.”<sup>59</sup> To conduct this envelopment, code named Operation Chromite, MacArthur established X Corps with 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division and 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division underneath it to conduct an amphibious landing at Inchon. Simultaneously, Eighth Army would begin their counteroffensive to break out of the stalemate.

On September 15, 1950, US Army’s X Corps as the LF, along with the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division as the first echelon amphibious assault force, and the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division as the second and third echelon LF, conducted an amphibious operation at Inchon. Additionally, throughout the operation, air and naval support proved “transportation, security, naval gunfire support, carrier aircraft support, and strategic bombing.”<sup>60</sup> In total, 103 various types of amphibious ships and landing craft transported 69,450 Soldiers and Marines, 6,629 vehicles, and 25,000 tons of supplies ashore.<sup>61</sup> With the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division first seizing Inchon harbor itself, the arrival of 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division enabled the expansion of the initial objective and eventual breakout from Inchon. By September 26, with the preponderance of the KPA divisions committed near the Pusan Perimeter, thus providing little resistance, MacArthur achieved his operational objectives of cutting the overextended KPA LOCs, capturing Seoul, and ultimately ejected the KPA from South Korea.<sup>62</sup>

In summary, the origins of the North Korea’s sudden attack on South Korea were evident as early as 1947 when Kim Il-sung became North Korea’s leader. Given the two Koreas that emerged from external influence coupled with a history of external oppression, nationalism and ideological

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<sup>59</sup> Appleman, *South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu*, 495.

<sup>60</sup> US Army X Corps, “Headquarters X Corps War Diary Summary for Operation Chromite: 15 August to 30 September 1950,” 2.

<sup>61</sup> Millet, *The War for Korea, 1950-1951 They Came From the North*, 242-4.

<sup>62</sup> US Army X Corps, “Headquarters X Corps War Diary Summary for Operation Chromite: 15 August to 30 September 1950,” 9-25.

beliefs of a creating a unified and powerful socialist state led Kim to adopt ends that sought to reunify the two Koreas under his leadership; even if this meant going to war. Over the next three years, through Soviet-backed assistance and Stalin's mentorship, Kim transformed the KPA from a constabulary force into a military equipped with modern tanks, artillery, and aircraft. Generating these means enabled Kim to develop ways that relied principally on land-based speed and maneuver to rapidly overwhelm the inferior ROK forces and seek a decision before the United States could effectively intervene. After realizing a political settlement was unlikely after seizing Seoul and given the commitment by the United States to intervene in the conflict, Kim continued to aggressively attack with the same means and ways in an attempt to rapidly destroy the remaining ROK and US forces arriving in South Korea.

However, Kim underestimated the relative advantages in means and ways available to US forces, which resulted in the KPA's envelopment at Inchon and eventual withdrawal from South Korea. First, although MacArthur faced significant time and distance disadvantages, the means through air and naval capabilities enabled an operational way to effectively isolate the peninsula. This allowed MacArthur to continuously maintain unimpeded access to the theater of operations and generate sufficient forces, equipment, and supplies in Korea. Thus, given the series of setbacks experienced during the opening rounds of the conflict, US forces overcame the inherent geographic challenges and persistent enemy threat. This illustrates the criticality of isolating the theater of operations, especially during the initial stages of a conflict where power projection is most vulnerable.

Second, although the position of US and ROK forces by the middle of September 1950 seemed perilous given their position around the Pusan Perimeter, the means of amphibious capabilities (coupled with air and naval capabilities) provided operational ways to maintain freedom of maneuver and eventually envelop the North Koreans unexpectedly at Inchon. Even though 180,000 US, ROK, and UNC forces already landed on the Korean Peninsula, isolation and massing forces alone was insufficient. Thus, to effectively transition to offensive operations, MacArthur leveraged amphibious capabilities and the sea as maneuver space to achieve his operational objectives of cutting the extended North Korean LOCs and initial political ends of removing the North Koreans from South Korea.

In essence, the events leading up to Operation Chromite illustrate the significance of isolating and maintaining freedom of maneuver within the battlefield. Amidst arriving under hostile conditions and given the initial strategic and operational initiative that rested with the North Koreans, US forces possessed relative tactical advantages given their means of air, naval, and amphibious capabilities that translated to operational advantages. The significance of this case study to the Army is the illustration of how conditions that require amphibious capabilities emerge. Fighting as part of a joint force, the Army has a role beyond ground maneuver. Whether gaining initial operational access or aiding in maintaining access, the Army must be prepared to support operational maneuver through the littorals, which means it must possess the ability to partake in amphibious operations.

Having illustrated the principles of isolation and maneuver for US forces, these same lessons were clearly observable by the Chinese during the Korean War. Following the success of Operation Chromite, the subsequent US decision to advance beyond the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel in early-October 1950 triggered 400,000 Chinese troops to cross the Yalu River along the Chinese-North Korean border to assist North Korea<sup>63</sup> This ultimately prolonged the conflict for two more grueling years. The lesson applicable today is twofold: First, this clearly demonstrates China's willingness to directly confront the United States if threatened. Second, China's close observation of the initial stages and their eventual involvement in the Korean War means they understand how the US military leverages their means to enable ways of isolation and continuous maneuver. Thus, today, as the US military, particularly the US Army, prepares to support the rebalance to the Pacific, it must not assume the Chinese are unwilling or unprepared to confront the United States.

## **Section II: China Today**

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<sup>63</sup> Wainstock, *Truman, MacArthur, and the Korean War*, 75.

Today, Chinese leaders believe they are in a “period of strategic opportunity” to achieve “national rejuvenation” by creating strategic space that enables continued economic growth.<sup>64</sup> Since the Chinese reforms began in 1979, their annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth has averaged nearly ten percent through 2013.<sup>65</sup> Today, China is the world’s second largest economy, the world’s largest manufacturer, and the world’s largest holder of foreign exchange services.<sup>66</sup> Although China’s interests are internally driven, their strategy depends on external engagements; particularly through trade and securing access to what they believe are important resources around their periphery. Of greatest concern is how far China is willing to go to advance their interests. Amidst claims of a peaceful rise, China’s improved means and ways tell a different story. Senior Chinese officials have expressed protecting China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, which includes Taiwan and territories within the South China and East China Seas, as a “core interest.”<sup>67</sup> As China seeks to pursue their interests, the growing tensions with surrounding nations pose a real threat that may lead to unintended military clashes, or worse, provoke China to suddenly attack a neighboring country in similar fashion to North Korea in 1950.

Ends: Consolidating Maritime Territories and Reunification with Taiwan

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<sup>64</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress, Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China, 2014* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2014), 17, [http://www.defense.gov/pubs/2014\\_DoD\\_China\\_Report.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/pubs/2014_DoD_China_Report.pdf).

<sup>65</sup> Wayne M. Morrison, *China’s Economic Rise: History, Trends, Challenges, and Implications for the United States*, (Congressional Research Service, 2014), 4, accessed October 18, 2014, [fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33534.pdf](http://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33534.pdf).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>67</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress, Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China, 2014*, 3.



In the South China Sea, China's claim over sovereignty of the Spratly and Paracel Islands involve disputes with Brunei, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Vietnam.<sup>68</sup> These disputes originated after World War II where China claims Japan's agreement to the Potsdam Declaration of 1945 meant they would relinquish all territories seized from China. However, as China remained embroiled in a civil war that essentially created two governing bodies after World War II, there was no clear recipient to accept and govern the relinquished territories. In short, the newly established People's Republic of China (PRC) was unable to resolve this issue given their internal struggles, and resultantly, surrounding nations scrambled to occupy these territories. Then, in the early 1970s, China's claims to these territories resurfaced after geological surveys identified significant fossil fuel and natural gas deposits underneath the South China Sea.<sup>69</sup>

Today, the Asian nations in dispute with China are leveraging diplomatic means such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to develop an effective Code of Conduct, which emphasizes a rules-based framework to manage and regulate the behavior of the countries within the South China Sea. However, as these processes do not address the issue of who actually controls the maritime territory, China appears increasingly suspicious of the diplomatic process and reliant on a strategy centered on coercion to resolve their disputes. This is evident in China's decision to increase its maritime presence within the South China Sea in 2013, where the Chinese now maintain three continuous Coast Guard patrols backed up by regular transits of Chinese Navy warships.<sup>70</sup> Given the historical roots of these disputes and the economic impact of securing rights to the natural resources, China's ends to control these territories are unlikely to subside.

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<sup>68</sup> David Lai, *Asia Pacific a Strategic Assessment* (Carlisle: U.S. Army War College Press, May 2013), 62.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>70</sup> Samuel J. Locklear, III, speaking for US Pacific Command, on March 25, 2014, to US Senate Armed Services Committee, *PACOM Senate Armed Services Committee Posture Statement*, accessed, October 14, 2014, <http://www.pacom.mil/Media/SpeechesTestimony/tabid/6706/Article/8597/pacom-house-armed-services-committee-posture-statement.aspx>.

Similar to the South China Sea, the East China Sea also encompasses disputes with various nations that threaten to destabilize the Pacific region. China has a longtime territorial dispute against Japan that stems back to the early 1970s. China's claims over the Diaoyu Islands, which the Japanese call the Senkaku Islands, rests on China's historical control over these islands and, again, claim sovereignty over these islands after Japan agreed to the stipulations of the 1945 Potsdam Proclamation.<sup>71</sup> However, Japan has refuted these claims stating they acquired these islands as unclaimed territory in a treaty with China that dates back to 1895.<sup>72</sup> The main reason for China's desire to control the Diaoyu Islands is to gain undisputed access over the natural resources underneath the East China Sea where up to two trillion cubic feet of natural gas and 200 billion barrels of oil potentially exist.<sup>73</sup> Currently, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) establishes an Exclusive Economic Zone with maritime exploration rights up to 200 nautical miles from sovereign territory.<sup>74</sup> The problem lies in the geography of the East China Sea where the width is approximately 360 nautical miles, creating an overlap within each nation's respective EEZ. By controlling the islands, this would strengthen China's claim over the EEZ, thus giving them sole access to the underwater resources.

Adding to the territorial and maritime dispute is an aerial dispute in the East China Sea. In September 2013, China unilaterally announced the establishment of an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) over most of the East China Sea, which overlapped with the preexisting ADIZ's for Japan,

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<sup>71</sup> Lai, *Asia Pacific a Strategic Assessment*, 41-42.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> US Energy Information Administration, "East China Sea," last updated September 17, 2014, accessed October 14, 2014, <http://www.eia.gov/countries/regions-topics.cfm?fips=ecs>.

<sup>74</sup> United Nations Website, "Oceans & Law of the Sea," last updated August 22, 2013, accessed October 25, 2014, [http://www.un.org/depts/los/convention\\_agreements/convention\\_overview\\_convention.htm](http://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/convention_overview_convention.htm).

South Korea, and Taiwan.<sup>75</sup> Unsurprisingly, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan have contested China's new ADIZ. To date, each of these respective nations have continued to exercise their rights to fly within their claimed air defense zones, thus increasing the potential for aerial clashes and providing another source for instability in this region. This was evident in May 2014 where two Chinese fighter jets flew dangerously close to a Japanese reconnaissance plane causing a near collision between the two aircrafts.<sup>76</sup>

As the territorial and aerial disputes within the East China Sea are interrelated to the core interests of protecting Chinese sovereignty and territorial integrity, it is unlikely China will compromise on any of these issues individually. This means, unless the all of the parties involved within the various disputes can come to an agreement with China simultaneously, the existing disputes will likely remain and continue to serve as a potential flashpoint for conflict. However, given China's tendency to resolve their numerous territorial disputes bilaterally rather than engaging in multilateral discussions, prospects of a political settlement, at least in the near term, remains illusory.<sup>77</sup>

The reunification of Taiwan is China's most important mission that dates back to the inception of the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. Under the "One-China Policy," China believes Taiwan is inseparable, and its intent to "safeguard China's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and its bases, both de facto and de jure, is unshakable."<sup>78</sup> To this end, China clearly demonstrated willingness to use military force to reunify the two states, as evidenced by two encounters in the 1950s and one in

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<sup>75</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress, Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, 2014, 4.

<sup>76</sup> Tim Hume, "Close call as China scrambles fighter jets on Japanese aircraft in disputed territory," May 26, 2014, accessed October 15, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/05/26/world/asia/china-japan-jets-scramble/>.

<sup>77</sup> Council on Foreign Relations Website, "China's Maritime Disputes," accessed November 4, 2014, [http://www.cfr.org/asia-and-pacific/chinas-maritime-disputes/p31345#!/?cid=otr-marketing\\_use-china\\_sea\\_InfoGuide](http://www.cfr.org/asia-and-pacific/chinas-maritime-disputes/p31345#!/?cid=otr-marketing_use-china_sea_InfoGuide).

<sup>78</sup> Embassy of the People's Republic of China, *White Paper - The One-China Principle and the Taiwan Issue*, accessed October 21, 2014, <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zt/twwt/White%20Papers/t36705.htm>.

1996 with Taiwan. In each case, US intervention ultimately diffused the crisis, and since then, China has largely reverted to diplomatic means to resolve this issue. However, in 2005, the Chinese adopted the Anti-Secession Law that stated, if the “possibilities for a peaceful reunification (with Taiwan) should be completely exhausted, the state shall employ non-peaceful means and other necessary measures to protect China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.”<sup>79</sup> This law not only clarified China’s intentions to use force in the event Taiwan attempts to secede, but was left ambiguous enough where Chinese perceptions for peaceful reunification would ultimately determine the use of military force. As China views the reunification with Taiwan as an immutable, any changes to the strategic context, such as the US rebalance to the Pacific, may create the perception that peaceful means have been exhausted, thus compelling China to use forceful means to secure their One-China Policy.

In sum, similar to North Korea’s highly nationalistic political ends of reunifying the two Koreas, China has similar ends that seek to consolidate territories around their periphery, to include reunifying with Taiwan, to enable economic prosperity for the Chinese people. Additionally, China is clearly unsympathetic about their zero sum policy, as evidenced in 2010 by then Chinese foreign minister, Yang Jiechi, who dismissed concerns over China’s expansionism. He stated, “China is a big country, and other countries are small countries, and this is just a fact.”<sup>80</sup> Thus, as China continues to leverage intimidation, coercion, and possibly forcible methods to pursue their ends, the potential for conflict remains. Moreover, the potential for conflict with the United States remain as Chinese policies and actions run counter to US goals of continuing to “support the advance of security, development,

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<sup>79</sup> Republic of China (Taiwan) government website, “The Official Position of the Republic of China (Taiwan) on the People’s Republic of China’s Anti-Secession (Anti-Separation) Law,” last updated October 26, 2014, accessed October 26, 2014, <http://www.taiwan.gov.tw/ct.asp?xItem=13556&ctNode=1938&mp=999>.

<sup>80</sup> John Pomfret, “US Takes a Tougher Tone with China,” July 30, 2010, accessed February 14, 2015, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/07/29/AR2010072906416.html>

and democracy in Asia and the Pacific.”<sup>81</sup> Given the various territorial disputes and regional tensions revolving around China, the 2015 US National Security Strategy specifically addressed concerns over China’s perceived ends by stating, “we will manage competition from a position of strength while insisting that China uphold international rules and norms on issues ranging from maritime security to trade and human rights. We will closely monitor China’s military modernization and expanding presence in Asia, while seeking ways to reduce the risk of misunderstanding or miscalculation.”<sup>82</sup> Thus, as the shift in national focus towards the Pacific remains, preparing for potential conflict, or at least developing the credible means and ways to deter conflict, is necessary for the US military.

#### Means: Modernizing the People’s Liberation Army with A2/AD Capabilities

In 2013, continuing more than two decades of sustained annual defense spending increases, China announced a 5.7 percent increase in its annual military budget to \$119.5 billion.<sup>83</sup> This figure nearly doubled the next regional power in Asia, where Russia allocated \$69.5 billion in defense spending.<sup>84</sup> The more troubling aspect of this increased annual defense budget is the lack of transparency in why China’s military capabilities are increasing. Indeed, improving the military means this provides other avenues for China to protect their “core interest” around their periphery. However, closer looks at specific modernization efforts indicate increasing means that go beyond their current peripheral disputes. It is apparent that China is clearly preparing to counter potential US intervention in Chinese affairs within the Pacific.

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<sup>81</sup> The White House, *US National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: The White House, February 2015), 24.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>83</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress, Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China*, 2014, 43.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

In a 2014 report to congress, the US Defense Department stated that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) have placed additional emphasis on preparing "for a range of missions that go beyond China's immediate periphery."<sup>85</sup> In simplest terms, the PLA have enhanced their means to conduct operations at extended distances by investing in sophisticated offensive and A2/AD capabilities. Jesse Karotkin, a Senior Intelligence Officer for China from the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI), believes, "The PLA Navy could lead an amphibious campaign to seize key disputed island features, or conduct a blockage or SLOC (sea lines of communication) interdiction campaigns to secure strategic operating areas."<sup>86</sup> Although this assessment only describes one of the China's military service capabilities, this begins to reveal China's ability to leverage overwhelming offensive capabilities to rapidly seize territories followed by A2/AD strategies against third-party intervention.

The PLA is modernizing their military under the expectation that they will fight short wars that are highly destructive, thus enabling a quick political decision. The doctrine of "Local War under Conditions of Informatization" codifies the PLA's operating concept.<sup>87</sup> This doctrine captures the PLA's belief that near-future warfare will occur primarily along China's periphery under "conditions in which modern military forces use advanced computer systems, information technology, and communication networks to gain operational advantage over an opponent."<sup>88</sup> As a result, the PLA is focusing their military modernization efforts, in term of their doctrine and capabilities, around integrated joint operations, information warfare, integrated firepower operations, mobility, and comprehensive support.

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>86</sup> O'Rourke, *China Naval Modernization: Implications for US Navy Capabilities – Background and Issues for Congress*, 84.

<sup>87</sup> Anthony H. Coresman et al, *Chinese Military Modernization and Force Development: A Western Perspective*, Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS), August 23, 2013, accessed November 14, 2014, 54, [http://csis.org/files/publication/130725\\_chinesemilmodern.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/130725_chinesemilmodern.pdf).

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 54.

At the forefront of China's modernization programs is the PLA Navy (PLAN) where continued emphasis on the quality versus the overall quantity of platforms is increasing their ability to conduct maritime operations at greater distances. Currently, the PLAN possesses approximately seventy-seven surface combatants, more than sixty submarines, fifty-five medium and large amphibious ships, and eighty-five missile-equipped small combatants.<sup>89</sup> As of 2010, China now possesses anti-ship ballistic missile (ASBMs), referred to as the DF-21D, which has the ability to target moving ships, to include US aircraft carriers and strategic sealift assets, at distances up to 1,500 kilometers.<sup>90</sup> In 2012, China unveiled their aircraft carrier, the *Liaoning*, giving them the ability to move beyond land-based aircraft with its thirty-six aircraft capacity.<sup>91</sup> Analysts believe the PLA will soon field a new class of guided missile destroyers with the ability to launch anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCMs), land-attack cruise missiles (LACMs), surface-to-air missiles (SAM) and anti-submarine missiles.<sup>92</sup> This will extend their precision strike capabilities against opposing naval, air, and land targets throughout the Pacific region. The depths in which Chinese capabilities can range will soon, if it has not already, disrupt US power projection in terms of targeting arriving forces and the critical intermediate staging bases within the Pacific. As such, unlike the relative strategic and operational advantages the United States held over North Korea in 1950, conflict with China will pose significant challenges towards gaining access to operational areas, and to a greater degree, isolating and maneuvering within it.

Although China's improved maritime capabilities have drawn much attention recently, the PLA Air Force (PLAAF) has also undergone significant upgrades. As a result, they now have the

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<sup>89</sup> O'Rourke, *China Naval Modernization: Implications for US Navy Capabilities – Background and Issues for Congress*, 74.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>92</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress, Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, 8.

ability to execute missions other than homeland air defense. Currently, the PLAAF is the largest air force in Asia and the third-largest air force in the world.<sup>93</sup> The PLAAF maintains approximately 1,700 fighters, 600 bombers, and 475 transport aircraft.<sup>94</sup> Since 2000, the PLAAF has shifted its focus from air defense to becoming a multi-mission force capable of air defense, strike, transport, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), and electronic warfare missions.<sup>95</sup> The 2014 DoD report on China stated that, “The PLAAF is pursuing modernization on a scale unprecedented in its history and is rapidly closing the gap with Western air forces across a broad spectrum of capabilities including aircraft, command and control (C2), jammers, electronic warfare (EW), and data links.”<sup>96</sup> These efforts are clear as evidenced by the recently released stealth fighter aircraft, the J-31, which is comparable to the highly advanced US F-35. Additionally, the PLAAF now possesses bomber aircraft capable of operating at extended ranges and have recently begun testing large transport aircraft to further enhance their strategic lift capabilities.<sup>97</sup> Similar to the effects of the PLAN’s modernization efforts, the PLAAF has the ability to conduct long-range offensive operations against ground, air, and naval targets hundreds of miles beyond China’s borders. These improvements to operate within the air domain further compounds to the same problems posed by the PLAN - gaining access, isolation, and maintaining freedom of maneuver within operational areas for US forces will be problematic.

Throughout China’s military modernization efforts, the PLA Army (PLAA) has also made qualitative improvements with an emphasis on greater mobility and enhancing lethality. Since the mid 1980s, the PLAA reduced their overall force size by nearly 50%, but the active strength still stands at

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>94</sup> Coresman et al, *Chinese Military Modernization and Force Development: A Western Perspective*, 191.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress, Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China*, 9.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 10.



1.25 million. This figure stands as the largest army in the world. Additionally, the PLAA has transitioned from a primarily motorized force to a mechanized force with improved armored, air defense, aviation, and air-ground coordination.<sup>98</sup> Together, this translates to a highly mobile force capable of combined arms warfare with substantial quantitative strength. In addition, the PLAA has also expanded their expeditionary capabilities given the establishment of three airborne and two amphibious divisions. This means China's land-based power is not restricted to Mainland China. Thus, in the event of a conflict with China, significant land forces may already occupy terrain before US forces arrive, which not only affects access to the operational area, but also influences the ability to establish and maintain operational maneuver within it.

Amidst significant improvements across each of the PLA's main services, in accordance with their doctrine of "Local War under Conditions of Informatization," the PLA is improving their ability to operate as a joint force. In 2013, the PLA conducted in a series of joint exercises, titled MISSION ACTION 2013, which emphasized long-distance operations and a series of amphibious landing operations.<sup>99</sup> Although China still lacks the material (air and sealift) and logistics capabilities to actually maneuver and sustain the full complements of their force simultaneously, analysts believe the current rate of military spending may soon provide them the ability to do so within the next decade.<sup>100</sup> Given this potential, the United States is facing a reversing trend.

As China has continued to modernize their military, the troubling aspect in regards to countering their improved means is the ongoing reductions in US defense spending. With ongoing reductions in overall troop strength, force structure, and modernization programs, the balance in military power, at least materially, is seemingly shifting towards the Chinese. Indeed, it remains

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<sup>98</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress, Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, 10.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>100</sup> Michael Chase et al, *China's Incomplete Military Transformation: Assessing the Weakness of the People's Liberation Army (PLA)*, (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2015), 136.

arguable that the technological superiority of the US military, specifically the Air Force and Naval capabilities such as combat aircraft, long-range precision strike, command and control, intelligence, and undersea warfare is unparalleled, thus offsetting the risk of maintaining a large military.<sup>101</sup> However, as evidenced above, the current rate of qualitative improvements coupled with the quantitative advantages possessed by China may soon, if not already, diminish the relative advantages in means possessed by the United States.

Of particular concern is the lack of means available to maneuver within the Pacific under hostile conditions. Admiral Samuel Locklear, the Commander for US Pacific Command (PACOM), recently revealed in his testimony to US congress that the Pacific theater currently faces significant shortages in amphibious capabilities due to competing global demands.<sup>102</sup> Translating this capability shortfall for the Army means planners should not automatically assume the Navy or Marines would possess sufficient amphibious capabilities to transport its forces, or better yet, establish the maneuver space within the littorals for it to arrive comfortably before beginning any campaign or operation on land as it has over the past decade.

Under Department of Defense Directive 5100.01, which identifies amphibious operations as a function of the Army, and United States Code (USC) Title 10, which requires the Army to maintain a fleet of organic watercraft to support this function, the Army currently possesses a limited fleet of causeways, landing crafts and floating crafts - 118 total vessels and systems to be exact.<sup>103</sup> However, most of this fleet is outdated and is “not specially designed for

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<sup>101</sup> Department of Defense, 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review (Washington, DC: US Department of Defense, 2014), X.

<sup>102</sup> Samuel J. Locklear, speaking for US Pacific Command, on March 25, 2014, to US Senate Armed Services Committee, *PACOM Senate Armed Services Committee Posture Statement*, accessed, October 14, 2014, <http://www.pacom.mil/Media/SpeechesTestimony/tabid/6706/Article/8597/pacom-house-armed-services-committee-posture-statement.aspx>.

<sup>103</sup> Department of Defense, “Functions of the Department of Defense and Its Major Components,” *Department of Defense Directive Number 5100.01*, December 21, 2010, accessed November 14, 2014, <http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/pdf/510001p.pdf>.

maneuver/offensive missions,” which means it cannot support amphibious operations under hostile conditions.<sup>104</sup> Further, as mentioned earlier, the Army’s overall ability to conduct amphibious operations under hostile conditions has significantly atrophied over the past sixty years where it once conducted regular amphibious training, institutionally established an amphibious command, and maintained the requisite doctrine to conduct amphibious operations under hostile conditions.<sup>105</sup> Thus, as the Army continues to clarify how to effectively support the US rebalance, it should begin by raising the critical questions of which service or what means are available to maneuver within the battlefield, which includes the littorals.

In sum, China’s military modernization efforts have vastly improved their available means, which not only increases their chance to settle the various maritime disputes through coercion and dissuade Taiwan from seceding, but it also increases China’s ability to counter third-party intervention at extended distances. Further, the relative advantages in means the US possessed over the KPA in 1950, does not exist with the PLA. The qualitative improvements coupled with the PLA’s quantitative advantages may soon, if not already, diminish the relative advantages in means possess by the United States. As the principle of isolation and maneuver remains the same, the glaring capability gap, at least in terms of means available to maneuver within the battlefield, is the capability to conduct amphibious capabilities.

#### Ways: Strategic Defense in Depth Across the Western Pacific

How China intends to use their military power remains debatable depending on context of the territorial dispute. However, as mentioned earlier, what is clear to most analysts is China’s intent to deny US intervention if or when they decide to act militarily. In 2011, Thomas Bickford from the

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<sup>104</sup> Army Capability Integration Center (ARCIC) Requirements Integration Directorate (RID), “Army Watercraft – A Capability in Transition,” February 7, 2014, accessed December 12, 2014, <http://www.arcic.army.mil/Articles/cdd-Army-Watercraft-A-Capability-In-Transition.aspx>.

<sup>105</sup> Boose, *Over the Beach: US Army Amphibious Operations in the Korean War*, 24-8, 35-9.

Center for Naval Analysis stated, “The United States is perceived as the single most important potential security threat and the one actor that could prevent China from attaining its goals with regard to Taiwan and other disputes in regional seas.”<sup>106</sup> Given this perception, Jan Van Tol, an expert on strategic and military affairs along with other analysts agreed that, “The overall Chinese strategy appears designed to inflict substantial losses on US forces in a very short period of time, thereby lengthening US operational timelines and highlighting the United States’ inability to defend its allies. Once this is accomplished, China would assume the strategic defense and confront the United States with the prospect of either paying a very high (and perhaps prohibitive) cost for reversing its gains, or accepting Beijing’s *fait accompli* [political terms].”<sup>107</sup>

Although this operational way sounds similar to the ways employed by North Korea against the United States in 1950, the biggest difference is China’s intention to extend the battlefield beyond a land-based strategy. Unlike North Korea’s emphasis on large-scale land-centric combat, the Chinese have undertaken a “counter-intervention” strategy that focus on joint campaigns on multi-dimensional battlefields that include the air, sea, space, land, and electromagnetic domains.<sup>108</sup> In essence, China intends to employ a strategic defense to not only disrupt US power projection, but also specifically target our ability to isolate and maneuver within the theater of operations.

A key aspect of China’s strategic defense against the United States is increasing the depth of their defense through two island chains along the western Pacific. Similar to the Japan’s strategy during World War II, Chinese military theorists describe an inner ring that extends from the Japanese archipelago to Taiwan, the Philippines, and along the outer edges of the South China Sea. The outer

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<sup>106</sup> Thomas Bickford et al, “Uncertain Waters: Thinking About China’s Emergence as a Maritime Power,” Center for Naval Analysis, September 2011, accessed November 16, 2014, <https://www.cna.org/sites/default/files/research/Uncertain%20Waters%20China%27s%20Emergence%20as%20a%20Maritime%20Power%20D0025813%20A1.pdf>.

<sup>107</sup> van Tol et al., *AirSea Battle: A Point of Departure Operational Concept* (Washington DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2010), vii.

<sup>108</sup> Cortez Cooper, *Joint Anti-Access Operations: China’s “System of Systems” Approach*, (Rand Corporation, January 2011), 3.

ring extends from Japan to Guam, and along the coast of New Guinea (see figure 2). Utilizing these rings as a measure of a layered defense, China seeks to prevent the United States from isolating the PLA and reaching a quick decision. Rather, through positional advantages, the intent is to force the United States to choose between a costly war or accept a political settlement in favor of the Chinese. Disrupting the US maneuver and basing between the first and second island chains using A2 capabilities while restricting our ability to isolate and maneuver using AD capabilities will likely achieve China's operational way of reaching a quick political settlement or bloodying the war.<sup>109</sup> Clearly, the means available to China enables them an operational way that is vastly different from what the US experienced during the Korean War. The extension of the battlefield and improvements in means will not only require a commensurate response in US means to overcome the threat, but may also require an adjustment in operational ways as well.



Figure 2: China's First and Second Island Chains

<sup>109</sup> Cooper, *Joint Anti-Access Operations: China's "System of Systems" Approach*, 3-8.

*Source: Department of Defense Annual Report to Congress: 2010*

Given these emerging threats, the US military has not stood idly by in this regard. To counter China's A2/AD threat, in 2012, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, GEN Martin Dempsey, released the Joint Operational Access Concept (JOAC).<sup>110</sup> In short, the JOAC provides a framework that describes the operational ways in which the US joint force will collectively achieve freedom of action in an A2/AD environment. To overcome A2/AD challenges, the JOAC seeks to employ complimentary capabilities in various domains, similar to the ways employed during the Korean War, to mitigate existing vulnerabilities and achieve freedom of action required by the mission.<sup>111</sup>

Underneath the JOAC are two complementary concepts that address the individual components of A2 and AD respectively. To counter the A2 threat, the US Navy and Air Force collectively developed a concept, known as AirSea Battle. This concept seeks to increase the synergy of naval and air force units operating together in a non-permissive environment in far distances dominated by the maritime and air domain to establish freedom of maneuver.<sup>112</sup> In other words, it addresses the operational ways in which the US military would gain access *to* an operational area amidst enemy A2 capabilities. The fact that the US Navy and Air Force possess an operating concept that can guide future force development and is applicable towards the military challenges associated with the US' rebalance to the Pacific is surely a step in the right direction.

Addressing the AD threat is the Joint Concept for Entry Operations (JCEO), which "focuses on the integration of force capabilities across domains in order to secure freedom of maneuver on

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<sup>110</sup> Martin E. Dempsey, "Release of the Joint Operational Access Concept (JOAC)," DoD Live, January 17, 2012, accessed November 14, 2014, <http://www.dodlive.mil/index.php/2012/01/release-of-the-joint-operational-access-concept-joac/>.

<sup>111</sup> JCS, *Joint Operational Access Concept*, 1.

<sup>112</sup> Department of Defense, *Air Sea Battle: Service Collaboration to Address Anti-Access & Area Denial Challenges*, (Department of Defense, May 2013), accessed November 20, 2014, <http://www.defense.gov/pubs/ASB-ConceptImplementation-Summary-May-2013.pdf>.

foreign territory within an operational area.”<sup>113</sup> Essentially, the JCEO picks up where AirSea Battle left off – power projection up to the littorals of the foreign territory – and describes how US forces will project power inland. The central idea of the JCEO relies on mission tailored forces using opportunistic and unpredictable maneuver to establish local superiority at multiple points to gain entry into foreign territory.<sup>114</sup> To exploit the advantages of the initially seized assault objectives, the JCEO emphasizes the ability to rapidly introduce reinforcing forces with in-stream offload capabilities.<sup>115</sup> Additionally, the concept emphasizes the ability to rapidly establish an expeditionary lodgment using airfields, seaports, or Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore (JLOTS) capabilities.<sup>116</sup>

How does the JCEO affect the US Army given the rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region? First, by noting the geography and distance of the Pacific, if land power is required, majority of the heavy equipment and supplies will likely transit to any foreign theater via strategic air and sealift. If the air and seaports are unviable, this will require entry operations along the unimproved beaches. In other words, the US Army will partake in amphibious operations to establish a lodgment. If the amphibious operations occur under hostile conditions, the US Army must have specific amphibious capabilities in sufficient quantities to operate in a manner described by the JCEO. This means, the US Army must be able to introduce land forces at multiple points of entry, rapidly transition ready-to-fight forces from the ship to the shore, and establish an expeditionary lodgment amidst a non-benign environment. Hence, landing crafts, causeway systems, and floating utility crafts are critical assets that enable the US Army to contribute to the joint force during entry operations and prepare for future mission on land. However, as described earlier, the shortage in available means currently precludes the Army from operating in the way described by the JCEO. Without amphibious capabilities, if “AirSea Battle” is successful, the US

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<sup>113</sup> Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), *Joint Concept for Entry Operations (JCEO)* (Washington, DC: US Department of Defense, April 7, 2014), v.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

military, particularly the Army, may find itself waiting on the outside of the battlefield unable to gain entry. Moreover, if the operational environment is similar to what the US faced during the Korean War, US forces may find themselves will fewer options to transition from building combat power to commencing offensive operations and seizing the initiative.

## **Conclusion**

The first section of this study clearly illustrated the importance of possessing the ability to isolate and maneuver within the theater of operations. The operational environment leading up to as well as Operation Chromite itself revealed how relative advantages in means allowed US forces to overcome the inherent geographic and operational challenges in the Pacific theater. As all of the services had a contributing role towards enabling the operational ways to effectively project power and maneuvering to effectively transition to offensive operations, the Army's role was not limited to maneuvering on the ground. The amphibious landing at Inchon proved the ability to maneuver via the littorals is critical within the maritime dominated Pacific theater – especially during the initial stages of a conflict where the ability to maneuver or maintain maneuver is most vulnerable.

The second section examined the current context of the Pacific with an emphasis on China's ends, ways, and means, which not only revealed various sources for conflict given China's ends, but also illustrated how China has learned and adapted their means and ways to counter US military strengths in the event the United States intervenes. From the perspective of the ends, China clearly intends to consolidate their peripheral territories and eventually reunify with Taiwan. This eerily resembles Kim Il-sung's political aims to consolidate the southern half of the Korean peninsula and reunify the southern and northern Korean people, which in 1950, turned into a conflict. Furthermore, as the Communist powers in East Asia believed that the opportune moment to advance common interests finally arrived in early 1950, which ultimately led to North Korea's sudden attack, China, likewise, believes they are in a period of opportunity to advance their national interests. This is not to say an attack is imminent. Rather, highly ideological beliefs backed by nationalism may lead towards



unexpected actions outside of established international norms, thus threatening regional stability and some form of US intervention, including military intervention. Given this potential for conflict, it is prudent for the Army to prepare for a Sino-US conflict to support the rebalance and support national interests within this dynamic region.

In terms of the means, China's thriving economy has placed the PLA on a vastly different course than the KPA's rapid modernization that occurred between 1947 and 1950. Unlike North Korea's reliance on Soviet support to train and equip the KPA, China does not depend on an external source. By continuously investing large portions of their GDP into modernization programs, this means the PLA's development in long-range offensive capabilities and improving A2/AD capabilities could increase unfettered. As this continues, the qualitative improvements to the PLA, which already stands as the largest military in the world, enhances the means available for them to forcibly pursue their political ends and counter third-party intervention. For the Army, this requires similar adjustments to the available means to effectively prepare for China's growing A2/AD capabilities.

Finally, regarding the available ways, China's military modernization has changed the battlefield calculus in the Pacific. The continued advancement of A2/AD capabilities enables China to employ operational ways that are vastly different from North Korea. During the Korean War, the KPA lacked air and naval assets to contest US access into the Korean peninsula, which allowed US forces to continuously build combat power amidst a series of tactical defeats during the initial months of the war. Additionally, the KPA lacked the means to deny operational maneuver within the littorals, thus exposing a seam that MacArthur eventually exploited in Inchon. In contrast, the PLA is better equipped to challenge the fundamental principles of gaining access and maintaining operational maneuver by ways of extending the battlefield throughout the Western Pacific. Not only will isolating the operational area to build sufficient combat power prove problematic, but also maintaining the freedom of maneuver within the operational area may prove equally if not more challenging against the Chinese.

The evidence provided in this study is clear – the US Army should develop greater amphibious capabilities. In the event of a Sino-US conflict, if China does pursue operational ways that seek to

rapidly seize territories followed by A2/AD strategies in the Western Pacific, the US Army does not have the means to counter this threat and operate in the ways described by our joint concepts. Given the concept of AirSea Battle, if the US Navy and Air Force successfully gains access to the operational area, the lack of amphibious capabilities precludes the Army, and the entire joint force for that matter, from rapidly exploiting the initial gains and seizing the initiative to prevent a costly war that China might desire. Stated in another way, the disparity in means and ways that existed in 1950 against the KPA does not exist in similar fashion against the PLA today. Clearly, China has observed the operational ways necessary for the US military to prevail in the Pacific, and therefore, intends to deny our access. If that fails, China seeks to disrupt our ability to isolate and maneuver.

Beyond the potential for operational failure is the overall risk to the US' rebalance. With increasing military strength, this will enhance China's ability to dictate favorable political terms against its neighbors through threats of force or coercion. As a result, critical US partners and allies may lose confidence in our ability to provide economic or regional stability, thus dissuading continuing cooperation with the United States. Hence, without the requisite capabilities to counter this threat, the deterrence factor and our overall ability to defeat aggression in support of US national objectives is subject to fail.

Given the glaring gap in Army's ability to maneuver within the maritime dominated Pacific, this study recommends the Army should develop greater amphibious capabilities while carefully balancing the available resources to meet global emerging threats. Although developing greater material equipment such as landing crafts, causeway systems, and floating utility crafts is a start in the right direction, modernizing the existing fleet to operate under hostile conditions is likely a reasonable goal in the near future. However, more than simply material equipment, developing the full range across the DOTMLPF is necessary to provide sustainable solutions that continue to adapt to the evolving A2/AD threats. Establishing Army-specific doctrine and incorporating training programs, either individually or with other services, is a necessary to familiarize our forces with the recently established concepts. Finally, given the increased interdependence to fight as a coalition, increased

bilateral or multilateral amphibious training exercises, particularly with partner nations within the Pacific that have amphibious capabilities, provides another avenue to share and collectively build our knowledge and experience on amphibious operations.

The intent of this monograph is not to claim that a Sino-US conflict is inevitable. Instead, by assessing the relative possibility using historical evidence and given the fact that China is certainly closer to the potential flashpoints than the United States, planning for potential conflict is necessary. Granted, the strategic calculus for any military conflict with China may seem unlikely given the significant risk to two of the most powerful nations in the world. However, just as the United States did not initially desire to engage in the First and Second World Wars, history demonstrates that the complexities and uncertainties of international politics may drive the undesirable to become the inevitable. Thus, to effectively defend US interests, the Army cannot discount the possibility and prudent need to prepare for a worst-case scenario, which may materialize as conflict in a maritime dominated theater against a peer competitor. Rather, by developing greater amphibious capabilities, the Army will fill a critical capability gap that currently exists within the US military.

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